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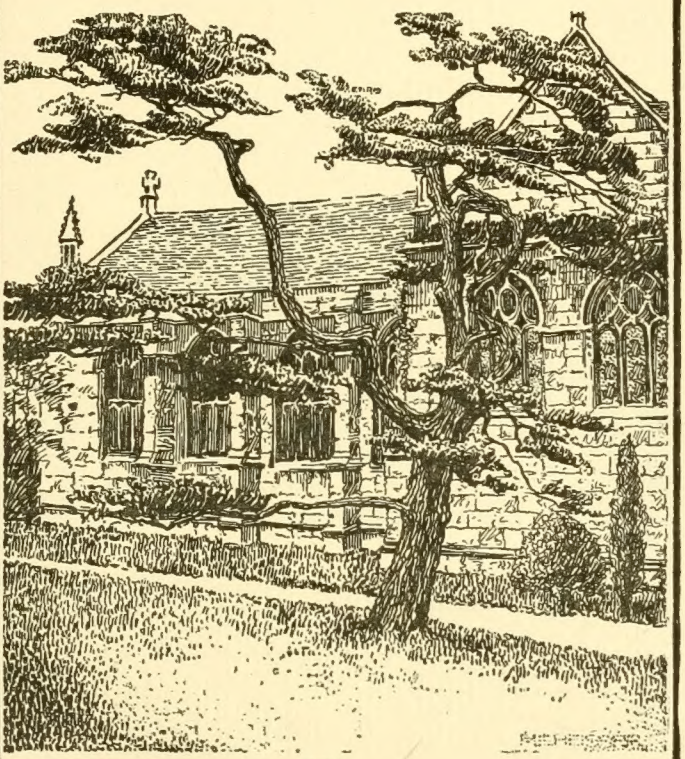
Octaves in an Oxford Garden

OCTAVES IN AN OXFORD GARDEN



BY

ARTHUR UPSON

LETTERED BY MARGARETHA E. HALSBEAR

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Gadham

-1-

he day was like a
sabbath in a swoon.
Under late summer's blue were
fair cloud-things
Poising aslant upon their
charmèd wings,
Arrested by some backward
thought of June.
Softly I trod and with repen-
tant shoon,
Half fearfully in sweet imag-
inings,
There lay, as might some
golden court of kings,
The old Quadrangle pav-
ed with afternoon.

No footstep sounded from the empty hall:
No echoes peopled corridor and stair:
The sunshine slumbered on the silent square,
Forgetful of slow shadows by the wall.
Pon is the passage where low lights do fall
And linger longest (I have watched them there)
Beyond which you will find a spot most fair,
A comfortable and a holy spot withal.

-III-

There dwells the very soul of quietness,
Seclusion's spirit deep within the green,
Secure from fame as some unsung demesne
In far Ionian hills.
There waits to bless,
With her all-healing, mother-soft caress,
The Sympathy of Trees, that friend unseen,
Soother of moods on whom all hearts do lean
Sooner or later, and their cares confess.

-IV-

As one whose road
winds upward
turns his face
Into the valleys
where he late hath stood.
Leaning upon his staff in
peace to brood
On many a beauty of the dis-
tant place,
So I in this cool garden
pause a space
Reviewing many things
in many a mood,
Accumulating friends in
solitude
From the assembly of my
thoughts and days.

-V-

As here among the well-remembering boughs,
Where every leaf is tongue to ancient breath,
Speech of the yesteryears forgathereth,
And all the winds are long-fulfilled vows—
So from of old those ringing names arouse
A whispering in the foliate shades of death
Where History her golden rosary saith,
Glowing, the light of Memory on her brows.

-VI-

What hath she uttered
that should make
me dread—
That brown-robed Abbess with her beads soft-told,
Who hath her seat upon the fragrant mould
And sees the gliding Centuries perfected?
Naught! Only good things saying, she, with head
Bowed to her task submissively, doth fold
An era by for every bead of gold,
And smileth on the glory of the Dead.

-VII-

Here did Oren make
himself a student
home
Or e'er he made a
name that England loves.
I wonder, as he watched yon
chapel doves,
If he did have some fore-
sight of that dome
On Lud's old hill where now
their coveys come,
With them that bear his name,
in lofty coves.
I wonder if this straying
shadow moves
Adown the wall as then he
saw it roam.

-VIII-

Blake hither brought
his book – to con the
sky,
Commanding sq-
uadrons of the upper seas
That streamed, impatient of
time's slow degrees,
Their pennoned fleets of pha-
ntasy on high.
Owing-shod time, that we
should bid thee fly!
Five hundred years good
Bishop Oykeham's trees
Down there at New have kn-
own such lads as these,
And they are patient still and
standing by.

Nature's Calmness

- IX -

All things seem ordered sweetly in the calm,
Full measure of the even-marching years.
This elm I love hath never fought with fears
And sickening heartbreak; but the steady psalm
Of one who trusts not vainly issues from
His quiet depth, — such psalm as lifts and cheers
Each tiny stalk or tender blade that rears
A nostril to the breeze-bestowèd balm.

-X-

Primrose and Phlox
and Clytie, as I
call
The lady Sunflow-
er never to forget
The faithful nymph she was-
ah, yes, is yet!-
These sway unto its heartsome
rise-and-fall
With ivies undulating
up the wall.
And thought, to inarticulate
rhythm set,
Joins harmony, while far
the world's vain fret
And discord dreamwise
vanish from it all.

-XI-

Soon will sweet Primrose be a
faded crone,
Yet seeks she no-
-w nor flattery nor fame;
And Phlox upon the mor-
row lays no claim
When her shed bloom shall
be around her blown.
This Beech, 'neath whom
their many kindred shone
As fair, hath ne'er heard any
wish a name,
And even he hath reckoned it
no shame
To live in silence and to pass
unknown.

Lost Inheritance

This is my lost inher-
itance. I look
With brotherliest
affections yearning
forth
To the flower-bearing sod.
Oh, what is worth
The strange estate of flesh
I strangely took?
In the soft soil the garden
breezes shook
From the wall chink just now,
there's measure of earth
To match my body's dust
when its rebirth
To sod restores old function-
-s I forsook.

Vicissitude

-XIII-

Strange that a sod
for just a thrill or two
Should ever be se-
duced into the round
Of change wherein its pres-
ent state is found
In this my form! forsake
its quiet, true
And fruitfullest retirement
to go through
The heat, the strain, the lan-
guor and the wound!
Forget soft rain to hear the
stormier sound-
Exchange for burning tears
its peaceful dew!

Old Song and a River

-XIV-

It was the lip of murmuring Thames along
When new lights sought the wood all strangely fair
Such quiet lights as saints transfigured wear
In minster windows crept the glades among.
And far as from some hazy hill, yet strong,
Methought an upland shepherd piped it there,
Taking a silvern echo from her lair:
"Sweet Thames run softly till I end my song!"

-XV-

By Spenser lay the dewy grass upon.
His pages shone before me as I read-
Like the gold daisies gleaming round his bed
His lantern verses upwards to me shone.
And never yet his song's rich note hath known:
"Sweet Thames" runs softly by his burthen sped,
And shall, while hymns are sung & prayers are said,
Low chanting his glad Prothalamion.

The Same Sky

-XVI-

I never thought until
one night i' the dark
When one I love
was on the labor-
ing seas,
How constantly the stars'
white companies
Stand watch o'er all, yea,
when horizons stark
Are swept of every other
sign and mark
So it were utmost desert
but for these.
(And then I think my spir-
it found its knees
And asked them to guide well
my dear one's barque).

Constancy

-XVII-

It is the same sky
over sea and land:
The same pure
stars attend great
London town
That tremble where the
Channel thunders down;
Is we that vary, running on
the strand.
Life bounds no fresher from
the eternal hand
Here in the Wadham branches
than out yon
There blurs the dusty high-
way, wide and wan:
Good is within all, having all
things planned.

Ford Madox Brown's "Christ Washing the Feet of Peter"

-xviii-

There is a picture—
you have seen it
oft:
The Master at un-
willing Peter's feet
Ennobling evermore and
making sweet
Each humble service wrought
with mind aloft.
Such mystic splendor shin-
es serene and soft
(Twas dreamt out through
long years & made complete
From visions ripe) that, turn-
ing thence, we greet
A new world where old shells
of self are dofft.

The Absence

-XIX-

He who this limned
is gone. They treas-
ure still
The wooden wafer
once he loved to hold
Which (can we question?),
now his hand is mould,
Yearns ever for his touch of
tender skill.
This ochre, longs it not to
meet his will
About the head of Jesus
aureoled?
And that sad patch of umber
some slight fold
Of Peter's garment would
so gladly fill!

-XX-

Even so our fancies' colors, keen of yore,
When one we love doth quit this earth-constraint,
Upon our palettes do wax dull and faint,
Unfilling not commissions first they bore.
For he is gone and never holy lore,
Nor shining nimbus of transfigured saint,
May anywhere the fragment ochre paint;
And the rich umber waits forevermore.

St. Paul's

-xxi-

One time from that gray close I did emerge
Wherethrough I had been toiling-& to me
Like some benignant rock a-
bove the sea,
St. Paul's great brow above
the mist and surge
Loomed kindly, and methought
did kindly urge
All men up to it till there came
to be
A hush on hearts, a deep tran-
quility
Of healing virtue, round the
minster's verge.

-xxii-

Thus Friendship
As a sacred citadel
Above the hurrying
crowd of men it
towers—
There in or sun or frost, or
shine or showers,
Invites to worship with no
beating bell.
This world's a city and it lov-
es full well
The midstreet sanctuary that
is ours
Thither to steal away renew-
ing powers
Those sources only at that
Altar dwell.

Dust of Eden

-XXIII-

Some dust of Eden
eddies round us yet.
Some clay o' the
Garden, clinging
in the breast,
Down near the heart yet bid-
es unmanifest.
Last eve in gardens strange
to me I let
The path lead far; and,
lo, my vision met
Old forfeit hopes. Alas on
homeward quest,
By recognizing trees was bid-
den rest,
And pitying leaves looked
down and sighed, "Forget!"

Restoration

-xxiv-

To one tired heart I said: If it be true
That, in the sad much-winding of your ways,
Your thread is broken out of other days,
And you know not what joy is lost to you,—
I pray you, turn aside awhile, and through
This quiet garden think on some old place
Dear to the child you were, and that loved face
That once in many a labyrinth was your clue.

Roman Glassware Preserved in the Ashmolean

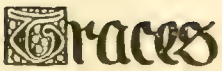
-XXV-

Fair crystal cups are
dug from earth's old
crust,
Shattered but love-
ly, for, at price of all
Their shameful exile from the
banquet-hall,
They have been bargaining
beauties from the dust.
So, dig my life but deep enough,
you must
Find broken friendships
round its inner wall—
Which once my careless hand
let slip and fall—
Brave with faint memories,
rich in rainbow-rust.

Life's Usurpation

-XXVI-

Tell them, sweet evening breeze poised here, no less
I love their memory whom thou goest to greet
Out there at heaven's gate, but that I meet
Less oft the idle thoughts of old distress.
Tell them the thought of them still lives to bless,
But, since I learned how much, despite defeat,
My life demands that I shall make complete,
I must yield up my cherished loneliness.



-xxvii-

Something of sorrow
am I not denied—
Share of the earth's
old universal pain
I own, though but as hillsides
own the rain,
Or solid sands the long wave's
stroking side.
Still, though no rains upon
the steep may bide,
And harmlessly the sea-
floods rise and wane,
The downward torrent-traces
do remain,
And sands bear record of the
sedulous tide.

Separation

-xxviii-

Early at eve on Onchan Head, because
The crimson lustre was upon the Bay.
And much bright melody began to sway
Upward from gay pavilions, and there was
None there to speak with in the music's pause,
I sickened of the glory and turned away.
Oh, that red sun had sealed a perfect day
Had I but heard thy low, sweet laugh's applause!

He is no lover of the sea
who loses sound of her voices,
inland wandering.

-xxix-

He is no lover of the
sea who loses
Sound of her voices,
inland wandering.
Still should her old melodi-
ous mystery spring
Around him, wend he where-
soe'er he chooses,—
And so within me, rhythmic
life refuses
By any other pulse than thine
to swing,
Far from thy friendship's
ocean though I sing
Where the hills tire and the
rough pathway bruises.

-xxx-

A great nelumbo
heavy on the breast
Of heaven's tran-
quil lake must be
the moon
Above this garden in the still
night's noon
Bending the gold of her reful-
gent crest.
Thus, to the surface of these
days of rest
Through all my absent
idlesse, late and soon,
The thought of thee doth blos-
som and the boon
Of the dear face that waits
me down the West.

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